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SELECTED TRANSLATIONS ON RELIGION IN THE USSR

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FOREWORD

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SELECTED TRANSLATIONS ON RELIGION IN THE USSR

[Following are selected articles; titles below, concerning religion in the USSR published in Nauka i religiya (Science and Religion) and in Izvestiya. Additional bibliographic information accompanies each article.]

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SCIENCE AND LIFE - SCHOOL OF TRAINING

-USSR-

Following is the translation of an article by F. Panachin in Nauka i religiya (Science and Religion), No 1, Moscow, January 1961, pages 64-68.

We know that the elementary school of atheistic education of workers is primarily life itself: the everyday work of the Soviet people and their participation in the practical solution of the tasks of communist construction. All the socialist activities, the concrete tasks fulfilled by the workers of our factories and mills, and the great achievements of our science and technology inevitably lead to the final triumph of the materialistic ideology, the victory of atheism.

Nevertheless, it would not be correct to suppose that religious prejudices, like other remnants of the past, can disappear spontaneously without a severe ideological struggle and complex explanatory work. This would not do. A thousand years' experience shows that it is difficult for an often beyond the powers of a believer to arrive at the right conclusions presented by contemporary science. For that reason especially it is necessary for us constantly to improve all the ideological and partly the atheistic work, thus reaching a new strata of the population, primarily the believers.

In recent years the scientific-atheistic propaganda in our oblast has increased considerably. The Ivanov atheists are lead in their work by the Resolution of the TsK KPSS "Tsentral'nyy komitet kommunisticheskoy Partii Sovetskogo Soyuza (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union)" "On the tasks of Party propaganda in contemporary conditions." Close connection with life and actuality of communist construction, maximum breadth of the sphere of influence, mass character, simplicity of explanation -- all these requirements relate in equal measure to atheistic propaganda.

Dissemination of scientific knowledge and criticism of religious remnants are now linked more organically with the concrete needs of life. This makes the propaganda more purposeful and effective. A larger number of lectures, speeches, and debates is now

organized directly in the factories and kolkhozes. For example, in the shops of the Bol'shaya Ivanovskaya Manufaktura there are working 135 agitator-atheists. The workers' club of this factory regularly organizes thematic antireligious evenings, evenings of free discussion, and showings of antireligious films.

In certain rayons, among which are the Gavrilovo-Posadsk and the Lukhsk rayons, for some time the propagandists have not been limiting themselves to lectures and debates. In cooperation with the public they set in contrast to the religious holidays new nation-wide feasts: Day of Completion of the Spring Sowing, Harvest Day, Livestock Day, etc. The Komsomol' organizations began to exert more initiative so that such important events in the life of youth such as a wedding, the birth of a baby, etc. should be celebrated in an interesting and festive way.

Everywhere you may now see positive results of the atheistic work. In many cities and villages public organizations together with propagandists were able to unmask and stop the criminal activities of various sectarian groups, some of which were against the government and illegal. The lecturers and agitators expended large efforts in explaining to the population the reactionary character and harmfulness of sectarianism. As a result of this, in the course of the last two years the group of the "Pyat'desyatniki" *pyat'desyat* — fifty — in Savin, the reactionary sect of the so-called "Istinno pravoslavnyye khristiane" (Truly Orthodox Christians) in Ples, Kineschmo, and Ivanovo, and the Baptist communities in Teykov, Yur'yevets, Furmanovo, Privolzhsk disintegrated. In our city the activities of the Seventh Day Adventists were discontinued. A considerable number of believers, primarily young people, broke with their sects.

The struggle against sectarian organizations of an anti-government and fanatic nature is lead unceasingly and implacably. The main concern is given to educational measures and emphasis is placed on persuasion methods. Propagandists and agitators explain with patience why our laws forbid activities of these sects. They unmask persons who, under the veil of religion, engage in hostile anti-Soviet agitation.

Quite a few lectures, speeches, and debates are meant especially for women. Women form a majority among believers. Representatives of the clergy make great efforts to include in their sphere of action people of not only advanced age but also young mothers, especially those whose personal life has been marked with a series of misfortunes. In contrast to these attempts of the clergy, we direct an atheistic educational work; we draw pensioners and young mothers into our community life and try to surround everyone with care and understanding.

To lead the believers away from religion is just one part of the task. The main goal is to educate them in the spirit of materialist ideology and the communist morality. This is a great and complicated task; all our propagandists must perform it daily. V. I. Lenin especially recommended to involve in it the school teachers. "... Hundreds of thousands of teachers — this is the machinery which must inspire work, awaken the mind, and fight against the prejudices which

still exist among the populace."

(Note: V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol 31, page 344.)

At present the oblast section of the peoples' education project in cooperation with the oblast committee of the VLKSM (Vsesoyuznyy Leninskiy Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodezni — All-Union Lenin Communist Union of Youth) are working on a number of measures with which to improve the communist education of the pupils. In schools of the city of Ivanovo the level of atheistic instruction goes up. The imbuing of the children with the materialistic ideology will be realized not only by presenting the respective material during lessons in class but also outside the class.

Last year even our institutions of higher education offered an optional 24-hour course, "Fundamentals of Scientific Atheism." The lectures were given by those instructors of social sciences who were best prepared for this task. There are even individual departments which began to be interested in the propaganda of scientific atheism. In the unmasking of religious dogmas facts of contemporary science and technology are used.

The lectures give series of lectures and call theoretical conferences and thematic evenings. Not long ago, the Ministry of Higher and Special Secondary Education studied the experience of atheistic education of students in the institutes of the city of Ivanovo. The Collegium of the Ministry approved the program and suggested to introduce it in all institutions of higher education in the Russian Federation.

Even the preparation of the propagandists of scientific atheism in the oblast has improved. In some city and rayon meetings of the Party, the schools of atheists started to work with a three- and a six-month program of instruction. The Party committees and local Party organizations started carefully to select and prepare the cadres of lecturers and agitators, and extended the theoretical and methodical work with the propagandists of atheism. Quite long ago the communists of Kineshma and Vichuga introduced into practice permanent seminars. In the new school year schools and facultative groups dealing with scientific atheism have been established in all the districts of the oblast.

It would, however, be incorrect to think that everything is fine and that there are no deficiencies. Many lectures and debates relating to general and special topics lack the atheistic orientation. The concrete material is often presented in the form of isolated facts. Ideological conclusions are not made in these instances. In many settlements and villages the propagandists do not have the necessary methodical media and materials on atheism. It cannot be said that all college instructors and school teachers participate in the antireligious propaganda. Our lecturers' groups are often small, and the subject material of the lectures rather monotonous.

The Ivanovo atheists are weak in individual work with the believers. But a sincere discussion often has a deep influence on a believing or wavering individual and helps him understand better the

error of his religious opinions. The influence of a simple, sincere discussion is well understood by our ideological enemies, the representatives of the church and the sects. They conduct such discussions with the believers systematically once or twice a week. And our propagandists, unfortunately, have not yet realized that individual work can and should become the basic form of atheistic education.

Up to the present time nothing has been done with people who belong to the so-called "dvadcatki" (dvadcat' -- twenty). Not even experienced lecturers of atheism know, in many instances, the state of affairs in religious communities. They are not interested in the structure and nature of their activities; they do not know the approach, the ways in which the clergy influences the people, and particularly the preaching activity of the clergy.

In this part of the country, for instance, there is an actual possibility to improve individual work with those groups of believers who are not very firm in their religious opinions. There are parishes and churches in our oblast in which religious activity is evidently on the decline. People stop going to those churches, do not support them financially, and depart from belief in God. The parishes lack sufficient means to keep the churches of this category. The average attendance is low; ten to twenty old women. It can be said that in the villages of Drozdovo Shuy Rayon, Spas Shelutino Palekhsk, Yermolino Seredsk, and Dubenki Gavrilovo Posadsk rayons, the churches are living their last days. Approximately the same situation can be noted in a number of other parishes. We need but small efforts of public organizations in order to "smother" these parishes, i.e., to reach a state when even the remaining lone believers would leave the church.

It has to be said that not all of our party and soviet workers, and Komsomol and union activists have understood the necessity of their personal participation in the propaganda of atheism. Many of them do not attend lectures and discussions on scientific-atheistic topics and do not appear before people with themes of this kind. Yet they could become leaders in this great and complex struggle which we are carrying on for the abolition of foolish church holidays and their replacement by new, national feasts.

In the atheistic education of the workers, such cultural and mass media as motion picture theatres, clubs, houses of culture, libraries, reading rooms, and also press and radio are used inadequately. The journal Nauka i religiya (Science and Religion) has not been sufficiently advertised; the oblast and the rayon newspapers publish few articles on antireligious topics from local life and restrict themselves to the republishing of articles from other dailies.

In certain plants and construction projects and in kolkhozes and sovkhazes, there have not been any scientific-atheistic lectures; no work among the believers has been done for long years. For instance, in the Aistov club of Shuy Rayon there was no lecture in 1960, and in the Drozdov club there have not been lectures for quite a few years. And in the meantime, in Drozdov and on the territory of the Aistov Village Soviet you will see churches. At the Kineshmo clothes mill

certain women employees go to church and observe religious ceremonies. But as for lectures and debates on atheism, there have been none for over a year.

Sometimes you will come across incidents like this: the atheistic lecturers spend more time on the history of the origin of the religious holidays and ceremonies than on their criticism. Instead of unmasking the very substance of the different religions, they indulge in giving accounts of tragic events caused by fanaticism and mysticism.

Our atheistic propaganda should be conducted according to the contemporary level of the achievements of the natural sciences. The occupation and the education must be always taken into consideration. V. I. Lenin strictly condemned simplification and vulgarization of atheistic propaganda. He emphasized more than once the fact that a believing person should receive the most diversified material on atheism, that such an individual should be acquainted with facts from all walks of life and with the latest discoveries in the field of natural sciences. This advice of Lenin is particularly pertinent nowadays when our socialist present is so full of atheistic content. Our task is to study the facts profoundly and systematically, and skilfully use them for ideological conclusions.

The introduction of the workers into a conscious struggle for communism, the rise of their political and work activism -- these are the decisive conditions for the victory of atheism. "The best school, the most rigid teacher," said N. S. Khrushchev in the 21st Congress of the CPSU "is life, our soviet actuality." The task, however, consists in using this condition in a most advantageous way, in intensifying scientific propaganda and the struggle for a complete overcoming of religious remnants.

BOTH LECTURER AND AGITATOR

--USSR--

Following is the translation of an article by A. Myagkov in Nauka i religiya, No 1, Moscow, January 1961, page 75:

One of the main tasks in the work of our section is giving concrete and operational help to the lecturer-atheists in the field. In sending our people on special missions into various rayons of the oblast, to settlements, and to villages, we wish that each lecturer could function, if necessary, both as an agitator and a discussion

moderator.

Experience shows that during lectures the listeners have many questions, but frequently are shy to ask them. The believers address us, as a rule, after the lectures. In personal conversation it is easier for them to express their ideas, feelings, and experiences. The task of a lecturer is to help such timid people, to have simple and sincere talks with them in order to explain more convincingly the errors and delusions of those who believe in God. We found out that such debates are very effective and yield good results.

Let me introduce one instructive example. N. N. Kustov, a lecturer from the city of Furmanovo, learnt in an individual debate with P. Isakov, a Baptist, disturbing facts relating to the activities of the sect and its head, N. Greytsova, in the village of Fominskaya. N. N. Kustov received as assistants in his work with the sectarians two other lecturers: V. M. Shemetovskaya and N. V. Posadskov. The first thing they did was to present a cycle of lectures; they then organized an "oral" journal. Later on, they submitted to the local daily Novaya zhizn' (New Life) many materials in which the activity of the sect was disclosed. In addition -- and this is the main thing -- the lecturers carried on great individual work with almost every member of the sect. They invited to the debates with the believers their own associates from work, the top workers, and the best agitators. A great, sincere discussion started. As a rule, the lecturers did not stress the criticism of the religious dogmas as much as the description of our socialist present; they introduced arguments from all fields of our life and existence well known to all believing people. After such discussions many sectarians started to come even to the lectures.

The work of our lecturers brought results before long. The minds of the sectarians were disturbed, and disagreements appeared. In a short time a part of the believers finally broke with the religious organization.

...A MATTER FOR EACH COMMUNIST

[Following is the translation of an article by N. Zhuleva and V. Bibikova in Nauka i religiya, No 1, Moscow, Jan 1961, p 76.]

A most unusual party meeting took place in our factory. The topic "Atheistic Propaganda and the Tasks of the Party Organization for Its Improvement" was discussed. A speech was given by N. G. Pletnev, a lecturer of the oblast committee of the CPSU.

For the first time in recent years, the party organization decided to examine such a question. There is no need to conceal the fact that the propaganda of atheism did not receive much importance. Now the situation is changing.

The party organization of our mill learnt that a young weaver, Valya M., joined a sect as a result of her mother's influence, who was a member herself. The Communist workers of the shop in which the girl works entrusted the deputy of the rayon soviet, master's assistant V. K. Siyalov, with going to see the girl at home and inquiring into the conditions of her life. The weaver A. V. Bezruchenkova was asked to talk to Valya.

It came out that the sectarians did not permit the girl to read newspapers or books, listen to the radio, go to the motion pictures, etc. Valya did not like these restrictions at all, but she did not violate them from fear of her mother.

The Communists and the whole collective overwhelmed the young worker with understanding and patiently began to explain to her the harmfulness of the sectarianism. Valya found in herself enough strength to break with this group of wild fanatics. We are convinced that they will not succeed in enticing her into the black net of their organization any more.

The meeting acquainted the Communists with a great many useful facts. During the speech most listeners were taking notes in order to inform the textile workers about what they heard. The speech brought about a lively exchange of opinions.

The Communists were not quite satisfied with the address of shift master S. K. Shevelev. In the beginning he was right. But as soon as he touched upon practical participation in antireligious work, he said: "We don't have time for that."

Fireman I. A. Kabanov answered him with the following words: "For the struggle against religion, the most harmful remnant of the past, a Communist should always have the time, energy, and initiative. If up to now insufficient attention was given to these problems, we should not assume that the same thing should be done also in the future. The propaganda of atheism is a matter for each and every one of us. An everyday struggle must be carried on against the religious ideology, and the Communists and members of the Komsomol must set an example."

CRITICISM OF NEWSPAPER RABOCHIY KRAY

-USSR-

[Following is the translation of an unsigned article in Nauka i religiya, No 1, Moscow, January 1961, page 77.]

The article ". . . A Matter for Every Communist," which appears in this number, is republished from the newspaper Rabochiy kray (The Workers' Land) of 11 October 1960. There are quite a few interesting facts similar to those mentioned in the correspondence in the Ivanovo oblast. Nevertheless, strange as it may be, even in the mentioned newspaper itself articles relating to atheist topics are found only sporadically. To count the materials of this kind for the year 1960, one would not need more than his fingers.

Periodical publications, when used skilfully, may become a mighty weapon of atheistic propaganda. For this, the local paper must know well the actual conditions in the oblast and always cover those problems which are the center of attention of the propagandist-antireligious agitators. The daily Rabochiy kray, unfortunately, is still far from performing this function.

What kind of questions are of the greatest interest to the editor? If they are feuilletons, individual worshipers are unveiled in them. If they are theoretical articles, then they most likely represent a relation of general situations from popular pamphlets; the state of things in Ivanovo Oblast is not revealed.

The article "Gods Have Been Made By People," for instance, would fall into this category. In it one may find literally everything: a history of religion and an analysis of the destruction of its "economic," as the author chooses to express it, "roots." But why the present generation of the Ivanovo people can successfully exist without any gods there is not a single word.

On 22 September the newspaper published a feuilleton on the Father Superior of the Staroobryadtsy church, Lazar Turchenkov. But should the criticism of the Staroobryadtsy religion, which had lost almost all its members a long time ago, be the main concern of the Ivanovo propagandists? Of course not.

Atheistic propaganda, both spoken and printed, should not be reduced to "pictures" from the life of the clergy. This way is very simple. The main task is to disclose the reactionary antiscientific essence of the religious ideology and practice, and to refute it by means of facts taken from the socialist life of the present.

Why did the newspaper not publish a single article dealing with criticism of the Baptist doctrine of love toward fellow men? Why has it not been able, up to the present, to concentrate the fire of satire, humor, and scorching irony on those who try to substitute the high

standards of the communist morality with Biblical concepts of morals? Is it perhaps that in a story about live people it was not possible to demonstrate how archaic the religious views of life and relations among people look on the background of the socialist order?

The daily events in the Ivanovo oblast offer clear and concrete material for similar actions. There are cases when old women baptize their grandchildren secretly while the parents do not watch, and when even parents invite to their homes priests who would baptize their children — sometimes even children of school age. But the newspaper did not mention a single word of those cases when baptism caused serious consequences, and the Ivanovo physicians had to save the "sanctified," to correct the impaired health of the children.

Virtually absent in the newspaper are materials concerning exchanges of experience in the work undertaken by lecturers and agitators among the people. This theme was actually developed in one article written by the Chairman of the Department of Political Education of the Privolzh'ye Rayon Committee, V. Barabanova, which was published on 30 August.

On 29 October there appeared in the newspaper an article with a most promising title "The Main Thing is Individual Work with the Believing People." Nevertheless, the author speaking of experiences in the work of the propagandists of Rodnikovo Rayon does not give a deep analysis, but rather confines himself to general statements. An isolated concrete example in the article shows the fruits of the work — but of the Baptists' work, that is. "The depressed frame of mind of the young woman was immediately exploited by the Baptists. In sweet and smooth words they enticed her into their sect. Appealing not to the reason but to the blind belief (so there was the belief already?! —Ed.) of the woman who was seeking consolation from grief, the Baptists succeeded in persuading Faya Z. to give up going to motion pictures, reading books . . ."

How the sectarians ensnared Faya Z. in their nets — this is depicted vividly. But as for the methods of struggle for the soul of the young worker, there is only a laconic remark: "We should not stand over such a case with our arms akimbo."

V. I. Lenin emphasized on many occasions the fact that the propagandists should give to the believing people the most diversified material, and be able to approach them from one side or another. This statement apparently slipped the mind of the editor. The atheistic topic in the Rabochiy kray is revealed poorly and one-sidedly. Articles of this sort are of an episodic character. Not even on the page for parents which often appears in the newspaper is there a single word about the atheistic education of children.

For the Ivanovo propagandists of scientific atheism, the oblast newspaper has not yet become a rostrum and organizer of mass work. The materials of this daily relating to these problems are as a rule abstract; they do not have an addressee. In that respect, they resemble blank cartridges; they do not hit the target.

HOLIDAYS, CEREMONIES, CUSTOMS

-USSR-

Following is the translation of an article in Nauka i religiya, No 1, Moscow, January 1961, pages 80-85.

The executive board of the All-Union Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (Vsesoyuznoye obshchestvo po rasprostraneniyu politicheskikh i nauchnykh znaniy) decided to call in the Summer of 1961 an all-Union conference which would deal with the introduction of new non-religious holidays, ceremonies, rites, and customs into the life of the workers in the cities and in the country.

The first preliminary discussion relating to the methods of overcoming the religious holidays, traditions, and rites and the introduction of new civil holidays took place in Moscow in June 1960 in a seminar of chairmen of the scientific-atheistic sections and in a meeting of the propagandists of the department. At present, discussions concerning this most urgent matter are developing in the republics, krais and oblasts. Realizing the serious character of the problems discussed in the June consultation, the editorial staff of the periodical Nauka i religiya returns to the materials covered, in order further to develop and extend the beginning discussion.

The Power of Traditions

It has been customary from time immemorial to consider such events as the birth of a child, the wedding, and many other happenings in the life of a man, as family holidays. Before the Revolution, a majority of these holidays had a religious character and the clergymen took an active part in their celebration. Many family holidays were celebrated at a church or a place of worship. After performing of the rituals, family feasts were given.

Not all of the participants of these ceremonies were truly religious people, but the church ceremonies had a definite religious influence on them.

Experience shows that even now the religious holidays and ceremonies are observed or attended sometimes by nonbelievers. They think that there is nothing reprehensible or harmful in it. Nevertheless, if these people do not become believers themselves, they support by their participation in church ceremonies the religious feeling in others.

The old traditions connected with religion are being broken and gradually overcome in our country. The religious ceremonies and

holidays, however, seem to be more living than the religious beliefs. This state is helped by the fact that the old holidays, ceremonies, and rites are not always set off by new holidays, new types of ceremonies, and rites.

Important events and milestones of public life are commemorated in this country by holidays which have entered into traditions and become a part of our life. One may mention the Anniversary of the October Revolution, the International Day of Women, May Day, and the Day of the Constitution. These holidays are characterized by demonstrations or festive meetings, exchange of gifts, etc. They are really merry and unusual. There are other events of public life, such as the anniversary of an enterprise, kolkhoz, or city, the conclusion of the year in an agricultural artel, the conferring of an award on the oblast, city, or plant, the anniversary of an outstanding person native of a near place. There have not yet been formed respective traditions in celebrating the civil holidays held on the occasion of the birth of a baby, the child's entrance to school, joining the Komsomol, graduation from the college, the wedding, etc.; people wish to reserve the important events of their life in a nice and solemn way.

The spreading of the new nonreligious ceremonies and holidays in practice will make the life of people still more colorful; at the same time it will help the ousting of the religious ceremonies and holidays. This is, in brief, the essence of the problem presented in the June discussion in the report of Candidate of Philosophy I. A. Kryvelev, "Nonreligious Holidays and Ceremonies." In this general form the problem introduced by the speaker did not arouse any substantial response. But the discussion which followed showed that side by side with the useful experience of introducing into the life of the Soviet people new traditions and ceremonies, there are many unclarified and questionable problems present.

Ten New Holidays in Lithuania

Should individual customs be recommended to the wide masses of the population in the hope that they will gradually become traditional? In other words, should the holidays, public ceremonies, and customs originate and establish themselves spontaneously, or can they be worked out to a certain degree "from above?" This question, raised by I. A. Kryvelev, was answered in sufficient detail in the speech of Comrade Pechura. In the Lithuanian Republic there are new public holidays, the operational method of which was worked out in cooperation with the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge. Some of these holidays are being successfully accepted in counter-balance to the religious ones and are ousting them, and others have no relation to the customs of the past and are completely products of the new socialist system.

"Learning the contemporary state of religious beliefs in Lithuania," said Comrade Pechura, "we arrived at the conclusion that religion

has a firm hold in various traditions, holidays, ceremonies, rites, and customs and that the clergymen use all means trying to maintain them. To make the celebration of church holidays attractive and solemn, the priests make all efforts to repair and decorate their churches and chapels, and celebrate ostentatious ceremonies.

The practice shows that many nonbelievers are active participants in the religious holidays. Why does it happen? First of all, the church skilfully takes advantage of many national diversions and customs which actually are not religious, and uses them for its goals; secondly, the church holidays in the country are often attended by many people who never think of religion and do not go to church. They come to see their friends and relations, to go to dancing parties, and generally to spend their time among people. The church uses this for its propaganda, asserting that the people take to God, when actually nothing of this sort happens. We were convinced of this in a most illustrative way as early as 1957, when in one of the rayons an experiment was made to test the effectiveness of a new holiday, the Youth Festival, which was supposed to set off a church feast. This was in Ramigal' Rayon. The so-called Communion Holiday was attended by more than ten thousand people. But when they found out that four kilometers from the church there was a Youth Festival in progress, all of them left for the Festival. This also happened again and again during the last few years in other rayons.

At present there are firmly established in Lithuania ten new holidays which have replaced religious holidays. The first of these, the Winter Holiday, is observed approximately at Shrovetide or, rather, shortly before.

The people of Lithuania also like the Spring Holiday, which includes a gala masquerade procession, a concert, etc. This holiday is usually observed about a week before Easter.

The believing people may celebrate their old religious holiday, as always, but coming so soon after a new, merry, and colorful holiday, Easter naturally loses its special character and significance.

Besides the Spring Holiday, there are in Lithuania the Days for the Large-Scale Planting of Trees, and the Holiday of the Spring Sowing. They are usually preceded by the Week of Cleanliness.

The last-mentioned holiday is mostly planned for a Sunday. In some rayons it coincides with church holidays and ousts them.

The clergy are much disturbed with that. In confusion they even try to shift the church holidays to other days to avoid a conflict with the newly introduced holidays. But this does not help matters.

The new holidays are gradually gaining in popularity among the masses of people; by virtue of their content, their merry, sound, and reasonable diversion, they counterbalance the church holidays and firmly establish themselves in practice.

A certain shortcoming in the organization of these holidays in Lithuania is that the majority has an offsetting character with regards to the religious holidays, and, consequently, such holidays (as far as the dates and forms of celebration are concerned) somewhat

depend on the latter. In the meantime the masses of nonbelievers would like to see respect toward their new interests and new spiritual needs which have nothing to do with the church traditions.

New Traditions in Soviet Latvia

Soviet Latvia has also collected a great amount of experience in introducing new national holidays, customs, and rites. They were described in the All-Union Conference by the Chairman of the Scientific-Atheistic Section of the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge for the Latvian SSR, Comrade Serdant. In his report he emphasized the fact that in Soviet Latvia the conditions of the struggle against the religious traditions, ceremonies, and prejudices substantially differ from the conditions in Lithuania. In Lithuania the dominating religion for long centuries was Catholicism; in Latvia, as a heritage of the past, there remained many religious currents. The Catholics solemnly include into their holidays theatrical elements, and the Protestants and adherents of various sects observe their holidays in a much simpler way. What is also important is the fact that an active antireligious movement in Latvia began earlier than in other parts of the Baltic territory. As early as 1905 important antireligious demonstrations took place in Latvia.

In the subsequent period the relation between the masses and the pastors, priests, popes, and sectarian preachers was often very cool, even though the churches did not lose all their notorious influence. Generally speaking, the conditions in the Republic are favorable for a more or less rapid overcoming of the religious remnants and a successful introduction of new, civil holidays, ceremonies, and customs which are based on the peculiarity of the life in socialism.

For that reason the atheists of Latvia do not give their greatest attention to the replacement of Easter, Christmas, and the Holiday of the Holy Trinity, but rather to the substitution of the old traditions which are connected with the important events of personal life by new traditions.

What should be the character of these new traditions? No one, naturally, has ever given or can give any binding instructions "from above" in this respect. The forms of these new holidays and customs are created by the people; those which are satisfactory become a part of the tradition.

The birth of a child was celebrated before, is celebrated now, and will, in one way or another, be celebrated even in the future. A question arose in the conference whether it would not be advisable to revive the custom of the so-called "Oktyabriny" which, in the period shortly after the Revolution, replaced the baptismal ceremony. In Latvia they chose a somewhat different solution. Instead of the "Oktyabriny," the Holiday of the Babies has been introduced and accepted. (For details refer to the article, "Novyee traditsii Sovetskoy Latvii" (New Traditions of Soviet Latvia), in the preceding issue of this

magazine).

The local Soviets of the Workers' Deputies reserve special items in their budgets for sponsoring public wedding parties, Holidays of Maturity, and Holidays of the Babies.

Holidays, Ceremonies and Customs of Belorussia

The Chairman of the Scientific-Atheistic Section of the Minsk Oblast Department of the Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, Comrade Ivanov, mentioned in his report that the introduction of new customs in Belorussia receives a great attention. New traditional holidays sprang up; among them is the Day of the Partisans. It occurs annually in June, and every rayon has a certain place which is in some relation with the heroic resistance of the national revengers against the German fascist usurpers.

In Lyuban Rayon of Minsk Oblast, the festivities are held according to the established tradition on the Zyslov island. During the war the illegal Minsk Oblast Committee of the Party and a partisan airfield were located there. In some rayons the celebrations of the Day of the Partisans attract thousands of visitors.

The experience obtained from the organization of the Komsomol weddings in Belorussia has demonstrated that there is a good possibility to set up a distinct ritual for this holiday. Originally, the public organizations tried to celebrate the public weddings as ostentatiously and attractively as possible. But not every organization has sufficient means for that. Nowadays, the public weddings are given with a greater modesty, but national traditions are used in them.

In 1959 the Central Committee of the Komsomol published a pamphlet entitled "Congratulations to the Young" (Pozdravlyayem molodykh). A film was produced describing a successfully accomplished Komsomol wedding. This film was distributed in many rayons and used very successfully as an example of the performance of a fine and solemn wedding ceremony.

The solemn Holiday of Maturity is connected in Belorussia with the distribution of passports. The presentation of these identification documents to the young people will be carried out in the future (according to the agreement of public organizations and the police) twice a year under solemn circumstances.

In many factories, mills, sovkhozes, and kolkhozes of Soviet Belorussia the draft of young people into the Soviet Army has a solemn character; anniversaries of the best workers are celebrated, Working Brigade Days and other holidays are kept. They educate the masses in the love of work and help to overcome the old religious traditions.

The question of establishing new holidays and ceremonies in Belorussia was amply discussed on the pages of the newspapers in the Republic and in various krays. Hundreds of citizens took part in this discussion. The common task in this field has been formulated by one participant of the discussion, Professor Katser: "It is necessary to

solve the problem in a way which would enable the Soviet people to celebrate the important events of life so that they would be something to remember, that they would strengthen the family and the collective, and that they would confirm in them their communist consciousness."

In practice, the new traditions are created by the people in the process of life. To achieve a wide spreading and a strengthening of these traditions, it is but natural that a rather long period of time is necessary. Authors, script-writers, and composers can be of no little usefulness in this matter. A number of problems connected with the national customs and ceremonies in Belorussia are studied by scientific workers of the Institute of Arts, Ethnography, and Folklore of the Academy of Sciences of the Belorussian SSR.

Among the ceremonies widely exploited by the clergy for the purpose of supporting religious beliefs, the funeral and the remembrance of the deceased have a special place.

Since the first years of the Soviet State the church funeral and remembrance of the deceased ceremonies have been challenged by civil funerals. A civil funeral usually consists of a burial ceremony with a meeting and speeches, accompanied by funereal music. In the city areas the civil funerals have replaced the religious rites to a considerable extent, but in the country the latter are far from being a rarity, even now.

What could account for this? In the report of Comrade Kryvelev an opinion was expressed that in the country it is more difficult to perform a solemn burial; for that reason not only the believing people but also the nonbelieving relatives of the deceased frequently agree to a church ceremony. We have to give thought to this, and do something to make the civil funerals more memorable and solemn.

In Lithuania special days of remembrance of the deceased are observed; graves are arranged and wreaths are laid; mourning gatherings are held at cemeteries.

This custom is also spreading more and more in Belorussia. The remembrance of soldiers and partisans who were killed in action during the great Patriotic War is usually observed on V-Day. In the Shulyatin village Soviet it is a tradition to hold near the village of Malyutino, at the burial place of soldiers and partisans, solemn mourning gatherings which are attended by hundreds of people.

It was stressed in a number of reports that the matter of performing civil burial rites in cities and in the country must be carefully considered in all details. Incidents like the one we learnt about may happen: some time ago the editor's office of the journal Nauka i religiya received a call from one of its readers. "I, a regular worker, have recently buried a man with whom I had worked for thirty years. A very painful feeling remained in me, but not only because I accompanied to the grave a close friend. On the way to the cemetery, the car was driven at a very high speed; the coffin might have tumbled down any minute. When we arrived, we were freezing and

there was no place to warm up, except for a church. Why must one suffer when performing the last rites? Why is it that in the cemeteries there are no heated places where a small mourning gathering could be held during winter time?"

The Vague and Questionable Problems

None of the speakers in the all-Union seminar of Atheists denied the importance of an increased attention to the introduction of new national holidays and ceremonies; life itself brings the new elements. But when an old content enters into new forms, the solution is far from being simple. Is it only the form that has remained of the old institution, or are there concealed in it also some elements of the old content?

Comrade Brazhnik (Kiev) declared, for instance, that the so-called Communion Holidays in the Ukraine have already lost their religious character and that the most important element in these holidays actually is the hospitality. During these days the people of the villages where these holidays are celebrated receive visitors (relatives, friends) from other places, and provide a treat for them. For that reason Comrade Brazhnik suggested not to fight against these holidays but to consider them holidays of hospitality. In those instances when they fall on the period of intensive sowing of fields, they should be moved and changed into holidays of produce, etc. This was the solution adopted by workers of Pereyaslav-Khmel'nica Rayon of Kiev Oblast. The Communion Holidays, coinciding with the harvest, were declared days of communist work. In the rayon newspaper the villagers of the mentioned rayon published announcements addressed to their friends, relatives, and acquaintances in other villages asking them not to come during that time because no church holidays would be celebrated. In the meantime, harvest holidays were organized and planned for various villages at different times so that people could visit each other. During those holidays meetings were held and agricultural exhibits were set up. The members of kolkhozes welcomed their guests with bread and salt, singing songs.

But is Comrade Brazhnik right in his belief that the Communion Holidays have already lost their religious character and become simple traditional holidays of hospitality? Comrade Prutkovskiy (Voronezh) expressed himself categorically against this. In the chernozem area, the Communion Holidays are still connected with church-going -- if they are labeled the Days of Harvest, then the "harvest" is gathered primarily by the clergy. Comrade P. is firmly convinced that these church holidays never can be transformed into holidays with a socialist meaning; if there is no way out, it is better to give them up.

Comrade Nu Mi Ala (Azerbaijan) said that in the Republic there exist many religious holidays which have fundamentally changed, and demanded that our attitude toward them be changed. During such days people indulge in merrymaking and do not say prayers or go to mosque.

Instead of taking advantage of these holidays for atheistic purposes, we denounce them and leave them in hands of religious organizations.

Comrade Khutoryanskiy (Uzbekistan), on the other hand, warned against a trick often used by adherents of the religious holidays. They declare Moslem religious holidays as national, people's holidays. In Uzbekistan, the urazabairam has, beyond any doubt, a religious character. To employ these days for new holidays is, in his opinion, not imposable.

We heard even an opinion that it would be much better if the new national holidays would not clash with the time of various religious holidays. The children's Holiday of the Tree has completely lost its former religious meaning mainly because it began to be celebrated not on the day of the so-called Christ's Nativity but at New Year's time.

The question relating to the form of introducing new holidays and ceremonies, partially to what can be and should be used of the old ceremonies, and what should be discarded and overcome also gave rise to quite a few arguments in the meeting. What should be the character of a modern wedding ceremony, for instance? There is a lot of vagueness about it. The report showed the urgency of working out the ceremony of a Komsomol wedding. In the ensuing discussion some speakers remarked that not only the members of Komsomol enter into marriage; sometimes even elderly people are wed. Comrade Brazhnik suggested to use the term "Soviet Wedding" instead of "Komsomol-Youth Wedding." The wedding ceremony, in his opinion, should include two elements: the national wedding customs and the solemn rite of registration.

In many cities the procedure of registration of marriages has undergone a considerable change during the recent years and has become more solemn. In the cities of the Ukraine, for instance, a well-attended registration of marriage is practised in clubs and houses of culture.

In the Leningrad Wedding Palace there are facilities not only for a solemn registration but also for a wedding celebration. Young couples, their relatives, and friends can reserve here also a wedding dinner. The young people are proposed toasts of champagne, etc.

Comrade Ye. B. Mayat (Moscow) spoke about the experience of the capital.

In the Moscow registry offices a procedure was established in which the marriage license is presented to the couple not by a registry office clerk but by a City Soviet deputy, who congratulates the newly married and makes a formal address. The ceremony has a musical background. This, naturally, is better than the previously mentioned public wedding. But even here certain blunders can be observed. The formal address of the deputy is in all cases the same, and its content leaves much to be desired.

A majority of the participants of the conference were of the opinion that we face the task of reviewing and, in a number of cases, setting up a new ceremonial of solemn nonreligious ceremonies pertaining to the most important events in the life of Soviet citizens. In this, it is necessary to take into consideration the varying conditions in

individual national republics, cities, the country, factories, and kolkhozes. A high degree of artistic quality should be expressed in a special brightness, emotional expression, and impressiveness in the new ceremonies. It is necessary that the Soviet ceremonies be more beautiful than the church ceremonies so that they remain a lasting memory.

In the course of preparation of the All-Union Conference the questionable and vague problems should be submitted to a wide discussion and the resulting positive conclusion should be summed up and critically evaluated.

SECTARIANS UNMASKED

-USSR-

Following is the translation of an article by Ye. Vasilyuk in Nauka i religiya, No. 1, Moscow, January 1961, page 90.

Those who have lectured on an atheistic topic know very well that one of the most critical and urgent problems which can provoke any audience — no matter whether it is composed of workers, kolkhoz farmers, students, or pensioners — is the problem of the substance of contemporary religious sectarianism.

This interest is inspired by a desire to orient in the complex state of contemporary sectarianism and to become armed by necessary atheistic knowledge in order to carry on successfully an ideological struggle against the antisocial doctrines of sectarianism. Numerous antireligious articles and feuilletons on partial, concrete themes, which appear in our press naturally cannot give knowledge of this kind; what is needed are pamphlets of a general type, written by expert propagandists of atheism.

Among such pamphlets (the number of which, unfortunately, is still rather meagre) belongs the booklet "Brothers and Sisters in Christ." Its authors are antireligious lecturers, Ye. V. Mayat and I. N. Uzkov.

The pamphlet consists of short essays which deal with the most wide-spread religious sects in this country: Evangelical Christian-Baptists, Adventists, "Pyatidesyatniki," Jehovah's Witnesses, and Truly Orthodox Christians. Each of the essays, which are written in a popular style, combines in itself a brief atheistic outline of history of the respective sect on one side, and numerous facts on the activities of the sectarians nowadays.

In well-chosen examples, the authors demonstrate in a convincing way the harmfulness of the religious sects; one may read about such fanatics as the "Pyatidesyatniki-Quakers" as well as about such seemingly "civilized" people such as Baptists and Adventists. "The reactionary sectarian ideas," point out the authors, "tear the Soviet people away from the masses of active and conscious builders of communism, confine them inside the walls of their community, lead them astray, separate them from public life, and foster in them a spirit of despondency, resignation, and indifference to everything worldly, to the 'vanity of life' (page 14).

The pamphlet is written intelligently; the authors know their matter, but isolated inaccuracies and questionable facts can be found in it as well.

The treatment of the group of "Staroobradtsy"-type sects, as "Popovtsy" (Belokrinitsa dissension) and "Beglopopovtsy" may rouse an objection. The "Staroobradtsy-Popovtsy" have preserved over a period of almost three hundred years a typically ecclesiastical hierarchy with archbishops, ministers, etc. This "Staroobradtsy" church should be preferably called a "double" of the Russian Orthodox Church, and not a sect of the "Pyatidesyatniki" or "Jehovah's Witnesses" type.

An undeserved space is given in the pamphlet to those sects which have already fallen into oblivion or are practically insignificant, e.g., the "Fedorovtsy," "Imyaslavtsy," and "Khlysty."

The appearance of the brochure could be criticized also. The popular style of the essays and even the print show very well that the booklet is meant for a wide circle of readers, including believers and sectarians. But the primitive cartoon-type illustrations and the gaudy cover will only repel from this work those people who have not yet freed themselves from religious influence.

All this should be resented both to the authors and the publisher for consideration for the benefit of further work on this pressing topic, which requires a great amount of responsibility.

I BROKE WITH ISLAM

[Following is the translation of an article by Abzal'dyn Asildinov in Izvestiya, No 31, Moscow, 4 Feb 61, p 3.]

A man is born twice. The first time when he comes into the world; the second, when he learns the truth.

These are the words of an Oriental proverb. There is a grain of folk wisdom in it; a man who has not learnt the truth is not yet a man; he is just an instrument in someone else's hands. Only the learning of the real meaning of life and its laws makes a man capable of everything and strong. Unfortunately, some grasp the truth not at once, but only after a long time. Even I belong to this category.

I am thirty-three years old. At this age people succeed in accomplishing a lot. Some invent new machines which make work easier, others conquer virgin lands, and still others teach children, fight diseases, or reveal the riches of the earth's womb. During my life I have done almost nothing useful for other people; in this lies my gravest crime in the eyes of society and in my own eyes.

It is possible to stop the hand of the clock and turn it back, but it is beyond human power to return the wasted years. Neither repentance nor admission of one's own guilt will help you here. But I wish that the fatal error of my life would not repeat in other people's lives, that it could serve as an instructive example.

I was born in a small village Kyzyl-Kyshlak in the vicinity of the town of Osh to a poor peasant's family. Out of eleven children that my parents had, I was the only one to survive. The local mullah cleverly took advantage of the grief in our family and began to instill in my mother the idea that her prayers to Allah were not good, that she did not observe fast and the ceremonies, and gave too little to the mosque.

And that was when my mother, Khadzhinisa, became a real fanatic. Our house became before long a meeting place of elderly women. They read religious books; I listened to them also. The child's mind was greedily absorbing the horrifying stories from the lives of saints, and I began to think that all people live on this earth for the sole purpose of suffering, tormenting themselves, and going through hardships to redeem their sins and gain the right to go to Paradise.

In 1934, together with other children of my age, I started going to school. I was a good pupil and in the sixth grade I joined the Komsomol (naturally, without the knowledge of my mother and father). True, at home I had to go through the ceremony of anointing; I had to fast, as before. I was doing it because I did not want to offend my mother whom I loved immensely.

The school apparently could have helped me to break with religion for good, but then my path was crossed by another man.

Ishan Valikhan became a regular guest at our house. Having found out that I had had ten brothers and sisters all of whom died, he said to my mother: "Your son is God's messenger. He must become a holy man. . ."

Valikhan started to teach me to read the Koran, praised my talents, and exhorted me to devoted prayers. Following his advice, I left school and occupied myself in reading religious books.

Then came the war. I learnt by chance that Valikhan received his call-up papers.

They came to look for the deserter; he was hiding in our house. I wanted to go to the military commander but the fear of God's punishment stopped me. I worked in a kolkhoz from morning till evening; the grain that I received was given by my mother to Valikhan and his children. We went hungry and it enraged me, but what could I do? Finally, once when my mother fainted and lost consciousness, I could not bear it any longer and asked the following day that Valikhan leave us. But my mother was against it, so I went to my relatives at Kara-Su.

After I returned home, Valikhan was not there any more. I was married forcibly to a girl whom I had never seen before.

In the year 1947, at the request of my mother, the imam of Osh sent me to the Bukhara Theological Institute, the medres. To be frank, I liked it in the beginning. We received nice gowns, "ichigi," and "chalmy" of black silk. With interest I studied Persian and Arabic, the history of Islam, geography, and mathematics.

We lived there in small cells, being completely isolated from the outside world. We did not listen to the radio, read the newspaper, and from morning till evening we were grinding at the Koran, applying ointment, and fasting. This continued for six years.

The first serious doubts about the trustworthiness of the Moslem religion appeared after I mastered Arabic, learnt to read independently and could translate the Koran. Reading paragraph after paragraph, I was becoming more and more convinced that this was nothing but a common collection of various religious legends, sometimes in no way different from the old Greek and Christian myths.

My doubts were growing from day to day. Once I asked the mudaris why the Koran says that the earth is level and on the geographical map one can see hemispheres. This did it, indeed! The mudaris brought me immediately to the preceptor, and the latter ordered me to say prayers for several hours so that the devil would leave me.

After I graduated from the Tashkent Theological Institute I was appointed secretary of the Kirgiz "kaziyat" (administration). Here I became acquainted with the hierarchy and was shocked. The nature of my position called for frequent trips in the neighborhood; in my function of an inspector I visited mosques and investigated scandalous events.

In October of the last year an eighty-year old imam of the Kok-Yangak mosque, M. Asadulin, did not divide the money between his cashier and himself but cracked his head with a club. The "holy" man found himself in the court as a defendant. In the fall of the same year in the town of Przheval'sk, Imam T. Kidirov and his subordinates had a fight because of money in the cemetery by an open grave. When two expensive rugs disappeared from the mosque at Kara-Su, it came out that they had been "appropriated" by the imam and the "mutavalle."

Among the Moslem clergy Shapaat-khodzhi Khalyknazarov, who has a high income, is quite famous. The Moslem administration of Central Asia receives about two million rubles from him every year; how much remains in his pocket nobody knows. It is well known that he spent

thousands of rubles on the wedding of his daughter last year.

Masadyk-Kary Saliyev does not live less luxuriously either. One of the funds that he received from his parishioners he built three houses at Andrizhan and one at Kara-Su, in which his wives live.

It is no use to speak about the life of the hierarchy. Each of them has several houses, summer cottages, cars, and a whole suite of servants. And all this is paid out of the money of the believing. I myself saw my spiritual senior, the head of the Kirghiz "kaziyat," Shakir Khadzhayev, taking bribes from imams for giving them income (i.e., mosques). Shapaat-khodzhi Khalyknazarov does the same thing. It is well known among the clergy that he deposed from his function the mutavalle of the Uzgen mosque Khalilov because the latter stopped giving him bribes. The imam of the Naryn mosque, Yu. Idrisov, imam of the Karabaltin mosque, Khanipakhun, and others were deprived of their positions for similar reasons.

Looking at the "actions" of the "holy" fathers, I finally arrived at the conclusion that none of them believes in anything, but only cunningly takes advantage of those people who believe in religion, and exploits the religion for his personal profit. These hypocrites preaching asceticism and denouncing all worldly pleasures do not deny themselves anything; they indulge in drinking, lust, and food without any limit.

I was deadly sick when I thought back about my long years of erring, about my downtrodden mother and thousands like her who believe in the fairy tales of the ishans and mullahs.

I, a former imam-khatib, masuul'-katib of the Kirghiz Kaziyat declare in open: the Moslem faith, like any other, is nothing but lie and deception. I am renouncing in public the ecclesiastical title that was conferred upon me and appeal to all believing Moslems with these words: tear down the dark band from your eyes; do not believe in the stories of your ishans and mullahs!

Religion, no doubt, is everyone's personal affair. But I became convinced from the example of my own life that religion is a disease. It bends a man toward the earth, takes away his strength and will, and makes a blind and pitiful slave of him. That's why I will write and speak to those who believe in the years to come: stop before it's too late! Don't ruin your lives! Get rid of the religious opium!

I know that my former colleagues, ishans, and mullahs will be condemning me angrily in all mosques, throw mud at my name, and threaten me with God's punishment. But I do not fear now any more. I saw real life around me and I want to live by respectable work like all Soviet people. I want to earn my living with my own hands. I want to go with my children and my wife to the motion pictures. I want to look straight into other people's eyes.

That's why I appeal to you, Yul'barskhan Marifov; to you, Musul'mankul' Zheyenbekov; to you, Mamasali Pariyev, to all with whom I studied at the medres: cast away this abyss of darkness and deception. Go away before you are too deep in this slough! Try to

understand that there is nothing more loathsome than convincing
people of something in which one does not believe himself. Go
away from it! We still can start a new, a real life.